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ABSTRACT

Using bits and pieces of the past such as charred bits of wood from campfires, broken pieces of clay pots, stone spearpoints and arrowheads, and shell or copper ornaments, the archaeologist tries to put together the story of early Indian people in the Minnesota region. A short story, one of eight articles, re-creates the kill of an Itasca bison about 8,000 years ago. The second article elaborates how the archaeologist put together the story of the Itasca bison kill after 30 years of study. How petroglyphs and pictographs may or may not assist in understanding the people of the past is the topic of the third article. "Learning from Legends," the fourth article, includes three legends about the creation of the world, and origins of corn and wild rice. The remaining four articles tell of the first people in Minnesota as the Big Game hunters pursuing the woolly mammoth and the mastodon and how after the glaciers melted, their descendants learned to use new food and plant resources, moving with the seasons and discovering other skills and customs such as weaving, stone toolmaking, metalwork, pottery making, building earthen burial mounds, and eventually farming. (ERB)

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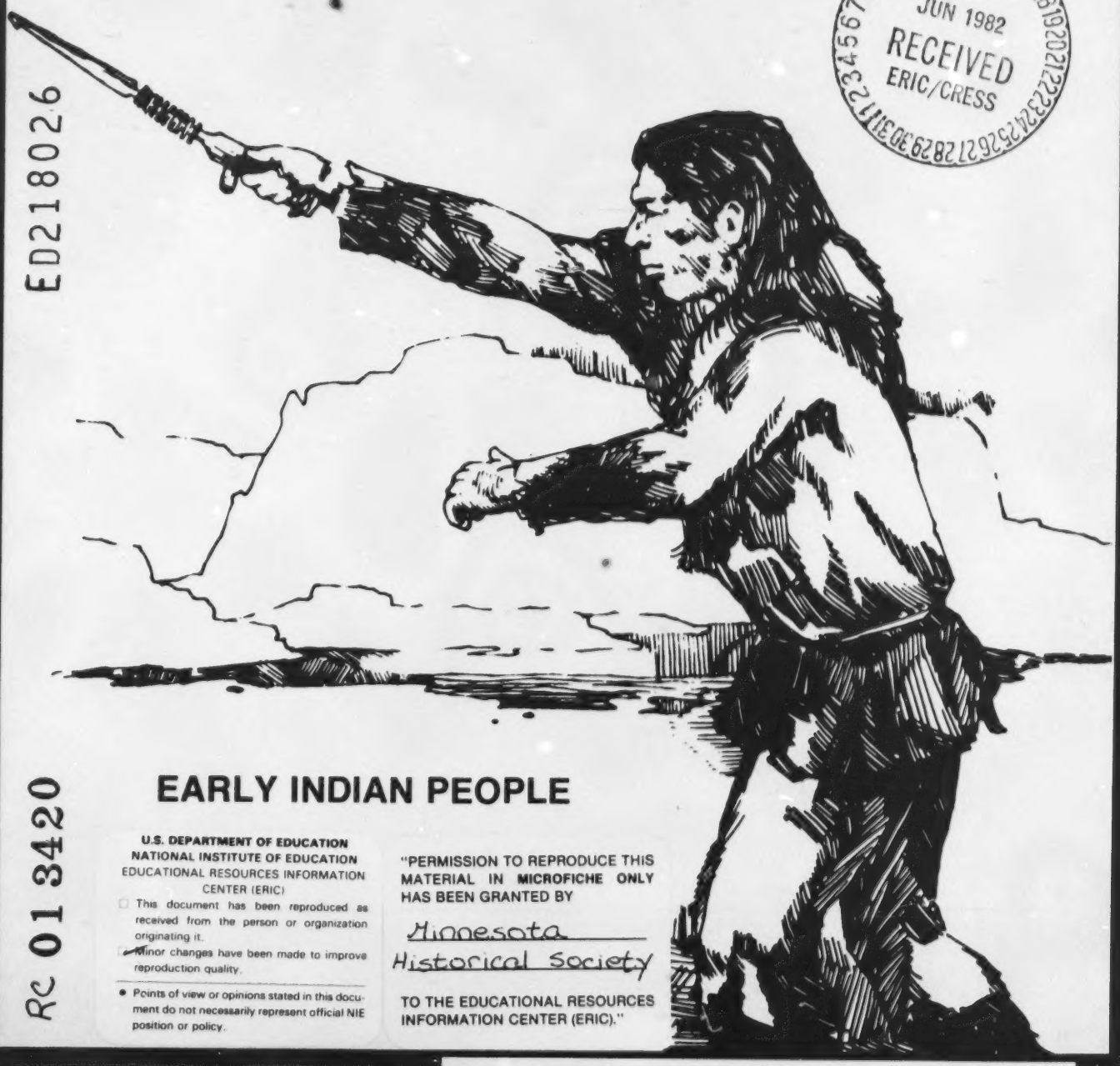

EARLY INDIAN PEOPLE

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Elisabeth Doermann, who likes to be called "Betsy," grew up in Massachusetts and graduated from Vassar College. She is currently administrator of the James J. Hill House, owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

Betsy lived in Minnesota a total of 11 years before writing this issue of *Roots*. Her research on the early Indians of Minnesota included visits to Jeffers, Mille Lacs–Kathio State Park, International Falls, Red Wing, and Pipestone. "I spent last summer trying to imagine how people lived thousands of years ago. I tried to look at everything from a new perspective, ignoring roads and other evidence of more recent history," she said. "Special thanks to Mary Lou Pearson and her students at Backus Junior High School in International Falls for their help."

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Cover photograph: Atlatls like the one shown in the hand of this early Indian helped hunters throw their spears with great force. For more information about this weapon, see page 16.

Frede Salomonsen.

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Early Indian people

When did people first come to the land we call Minnesota? What was life like for them? What did they eat and wear? What tools did they use? How did their lives change over time?

These questions are not easy to answer. Early people did not record the story of their lives in diaries, letters, or newspapers. They moved often and built few lasting homes.

But early people did leave behind clues that help us get a picture of how they lived. They left charred bits of wood from campfires, broken pieces of clay pots, stone spearpoints and arrowheads, and shell or copper ornaments. Sometimes there are traces of pits dug for storing food, or mounds of earth built for burying the dead or for places of worship.

From these clues the *archaeologist* tries to put together the story of early Indian people in the Minnesota region. He fits the bits and pieces together with all the evidence he and others have discovered before. He studies climate, plants, and animals. Once in a while he finds so many clues that he can tell a story in detail. With such clues, a day of hunting thousands of years ago can come alive so that we feel its excitement, danger, and hard work.

A different view of the lives of Minnesota's early people comes from looking at the pictures they left. Hunters made carvings in stone ledges to tell of their adventures, or maybe to work magic. Travelers painted pictures on rocks beside northern lakes and rivers. Some groups of people built burial mounds in the shapes of animals, birds, turtles, and snakes. By studying these pictures from the past, we can begin to guess how the people who made them saw themselves and their world. For the early Indian people all living creatures seem to have had special power. Trees, rocks, wind, and weather, as well as animals and people, had spirits.

A third glimpse into the lives of early people comes through studying their myths and legends. Stories were told by grandparents and passed on to great-grandchildren. The legends of modern Indians have roots in those tales told long ago. They show us how men and women looked at themselves and laughed and were sad, how closely they lived with nature, and how they explained the unknown.

One story of early Indians in Minnesota is told through carvings like this one from the Jeffers Petroglyphs.

Evidence found by archaeologists, pictures left by the early people, and legends passed from generation to generation work together to tell us how early Indians lived in Minnesota:

We know that people have lived here at least 10,000 years. The first people came from the west following the tracks of large game animals. As thousands of years passed, people moved into Minnesota from the north, the east, and the south. Each group brought new customs and different ways of living.

People learned to plant corn and squash and to harvest wild rice. But even after these changes, early Indian people in Minnesota lived mainly by hunting, fishing, and gathering wild plants. Plentiful game provided food, skins for clothing and shelter, and bones for tools and weapons. The plants and trees produced fruits, nuts and vegetables, as well as fibers for making nets and snares. Tools and spearpoints were made of stone, copper, and carved bone. Pottery was made of clay found along riverbanks.

All travel was on foot or by boat. There were no horses in North America until Spanish explorers brought them in the 1500s. Indian people did not keep large domestic animals like oxen or donkeys to help with heavy work. Only the dog seems to have lived with them from the earliest times. For many centuries they moved often and traveled light, carrying with them only the tools and clothing they needed from day to day.

We have many questions about the early people that cannot be answered. Most of them start with *How*? and *What if*? For now, the answers must come from a mixture of pottery fragments and spearpoints, pictures and myths, and a little imagination.

The story will never be complete. It will always start with words like *probably* and *possibly*. It is a story that will always fascinate people in search of their roots and ancestors. The story will always contain mystery, and it will always stir our imaginations.

This skull found in Nicollet Valley at Lake Itasca helped archaeologists put together the story of a bison hunt. The figure on page 5 shows a bison from the Indian rock carvings at Jeffers.

The Itasca bison kill recreated

One autumn, about 8,000 years ago, a group of hunters camped beside a small stream near Lake Itasca in northwestern Minnesota. They had been there the spring before, fishing and catching turtles, as had their grandfathers before them. Now they needed meat for the winter, bone and horn for tools, and hides for clothing and shelter. They knew that bison, or buffalo, herds would be moving from the prairie to wooded areas soon. The hunters had come for the bison.

Four or five men, maybe brothers or cousins, set up camp with their families. Some of these families had dogs. Each household made its separate camp along the western ridge of the Nicollet Valley. From this position the hunters would be able to see the approaching bison. The westerly winds would prevent the animals from catching the scent of humans.

After setting up the camp, the men prepared for the hunt. They had brought along some special spearpoints, but the hunters would make most of their weapons on the spot. First they searched for different kinds of stone. They spent several days chipping and grinding the stones into sharp spearpoints, butchering knives, and scrapers. In the meantime the women and children gathered acorns and hazelnuts. Then the men began their watch.

Soon they spotted the animals coming toward the stream. With their spears ready, the hunters waited quietly in the tall grass and bushes. As the bison moved down the steep bank, the hunters closed in. The animals became bogged down in the deep, sticky mud at the water crossing. There the hunters charged.

The hunters drove their stone-tipped spears into the animals at close range. Then they jumped away quickly to avoid the tossing horns and sharp hooves of the great beasts. The bison thrashed about and struggled in the mud and bellowed with fear and pain. A dog got caught in the fray and was killed. By the end of the day 16 bison lay dead. Such a kill was cause for great joy and thanksgiving in the little camp that night. But much work lay before the hunting party.

After the hunt, the men and women took their stone knives and cut up the animals near the spot where they had fallen. During the next few days the men carried the skins and pieces of meat up to the ridge. There the women scraped the hides and dried the meat.

The hunters stayed at the site only a few weeks. Then they moved with their families to another temporary hunting camp. Soon they would go into the shelter of the woods for the winter. This time there would be enough food to last through the cold months ahead.

The archaeologist as detective

Bone fragments found at the Itasca site

Mammals	
Water shrew	3
Snowshoe rabbit	11
Eastern chipmunk	1
Least chipmunk	1
Franklin's ground squirrel	1
Plains pocket gopher	1
Beaver	4
Mouse/vole	13
Muskrat	154
Jumping mouse	1
Gray wolf	15
Domestic dog	1
Black bear	2
Fisher	2
Otter	3
White-tailed deer	8
Moose	1
Bison	2,900
Fish	
Sucker	101
Minnow	2
Northern pike	134
Bass	14
Walleye	482
Sunfish	1
Reptiles	
Painted turtle	349
Snapping turtle	7
Snake	3

How do we know that the Itasca bison kill really took place? The story began to unfold in 1937 when a construction crew building a bridge over Nicollet Creek unearthed some bones. Construction was stopped while archaeologists from the University of Minnesota examined the find. They learned that most of the bones were those of a now-extinct kind of bison, larger than the buffalo that roamed the plains in more recent times. When the archaeologists discovered stone spearpoints, knives, and other tools in the same area, they knew that men had killed those bison. The hunters must have lived near Lake Itasca about 8,000 years ago.

In 1963, C. Thomas Shay and a team of students reopened the site, hoping to learn more about the bison hunt. Over the next several years, working mostly during the summers, they unearthed more than 4,000 fragments of bison and other animal bones. They took pollen core samples from the bottom of the bog. These long cores of sediment contained perfect cross sections of the layers of pollen that had drifted in the air and fallen to the ground over thousands of years. The archaeologists studied over 9,000 plant and animal remains, revealing materials from 9,500 years ago to the present.

What do the bits and pieces of evidence discovered by the archaeologists tell us? When examined in the laboratory, the pollen core samples showed that 8,000 years ago, marshes, meadows, and prairies filled the area around Lake Itasca. There was good grazing for animals. There were many wild fruit and nut-bearing trees.

Walleye, northern pike, sucker, and bass bones showed up in large numbers. Fishing must have been as excellent there 8,000 years ago as it is now. These game hunters had no fishhooks. They must have speared and clubbed their catch when the fish were laying eggs in the spring. The fish bones, and the discovery of many turtle shells, suggested people had been there before.

The hunters brought some spearpoints with them. We know this because some of the points found at Itasca were made of *chalcedony*. This brown stone is found only in North Dakota. But the archaeologists also found hundreds of flakes and bits of local stone, leftovers from the shaping of weapons. The hunters must have made most of their spearpoints just before the kill.

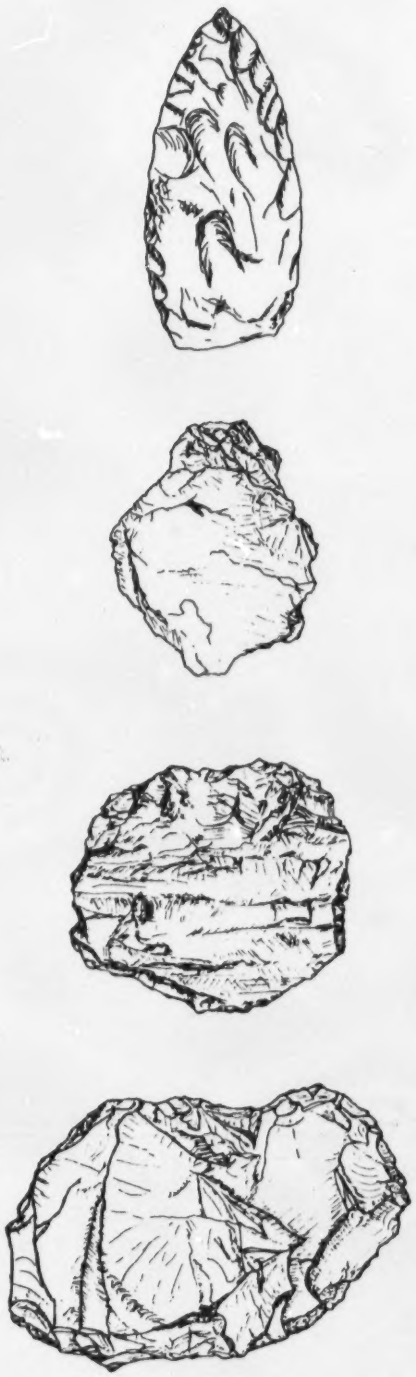
The shells of many acorns and hazelnuts, which fall in autumn, were uncovered. The women probably collected this food while the men prepared for the hunt.

Many of the bison bones were found in one area at the bottom of the valley. They belonged to 16 animals. This much meat would have fed a group of five families, or 25 people, for some time. This led the archaeologists to believe that at least four or five men hunted that day.

Many of the killed bison were half grown. None were newborn. The hunt must have taken place in the fall or there would have been younger calves in the herd. Dog bones found in the valley indicated that the hunters had dogs and one dog died there.

Large cutting tools were also found with the bison bones. Butchering must have taken place where the animals fell, for the bison were very heavy. Scraping tools on higher ground point to skin and meat processing near the camps on the ridge. No hearth sites were found. However, early hunters knew how to make fires and had used fire as a weapon and tool for thousands of generations. The women probably dried and smoked the meat over campfires.

Archaeologists put together the story of the Itasca bison kill after 30 years of study. They had to pull together all they knew about the area and about the habits of early hunters. The explanation must start out with words like *possibly*, *probably*, and *as far as we know*. But the story has much research behind it.



These stone tools were found by archaeologists at the Itasca bison kill site. The two smaller tools at the top were found on the hill and were probably used for scraping hides. The larger tools were found in the bog and are thought to have been used for butchering the bison.

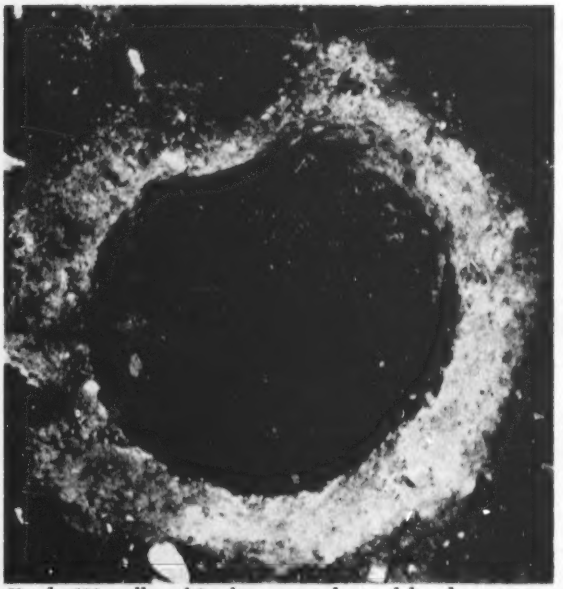
Looking for clues

If only the archaeologist could have x-ray eyes to see just ten feet into the earth! He or she might then piece together a map of early Minnesota. It would show campsites, villages, and the paths that linked them together, just as the cities, towns, and roads are shown on modern maps. The map would not tell him what life was like in those places. But it could tell him where to go to find out.

How *does* the archaeologist discover a site? He starts by looking on the surface. He may see clues like the mounds built for burial. Or he may discover a site by accident, as was the case of the Itasca bison kill site. Farmers often uncover clues when plowing their fields. The archaeologist can look at patterns of plant life. Poison ivy usually grows where soil has been disturbed — another clue to the places where people lived or worked hundreds of years ago.

This circular fire pit appeared as a darker area on lighter soil in Mille Lacs–Kathio State Park.

The archaeologist can also look for clues in the maps of early surveyors and pictures made by aerial photographers. Old maps show features that have since been altered by people or nature: mounds that have been plowed under or caves that have been buried. *Topographical* maps show the high and low places, the wet and the dry. Although they may not show the land as early inhabitants knew it, such maps can give clues to ancient lakeshores and other places where people lived.



Early Woodland Indians used pits like this one to thresh wild rice.

Once he starts looking, what kinds of objects will the archaeologist find to tell him where people lived centuries ago? There may be bits of blackened stone or pottery, patches of soil darkened by ashes, or pieces of bone and seed. These indicate hearths or fire pits, where pots and tools were made and food was prepared.

If there are no good clues on the surface, the archaeologist asks: Where would people choose to live? He knows that early Indian people needed water to drink. They needed food. Fish lived in the water. Game trails often followed waterways. The archaeologist looks for ancient campsites and villages near rivers and streams.

When a hunter made knives and spearpoints, chips of stone and bone fell to the ground. Discarded meat and fish bones, shells and bits of stone, and broken pots and tools were in the garbage piles of early villages. It is hard to find evidence of the houses of Minnesota's early people. Wood, bark, and skins have long since decayed. But sometimes the archaeologist can see the empty holes where lodge poles were set into the ground.

Archaeologists use all these clues to help decide where to dig. But without the x-ray eyes, they must work many years at many sites to begin piecing together a map of the early land.

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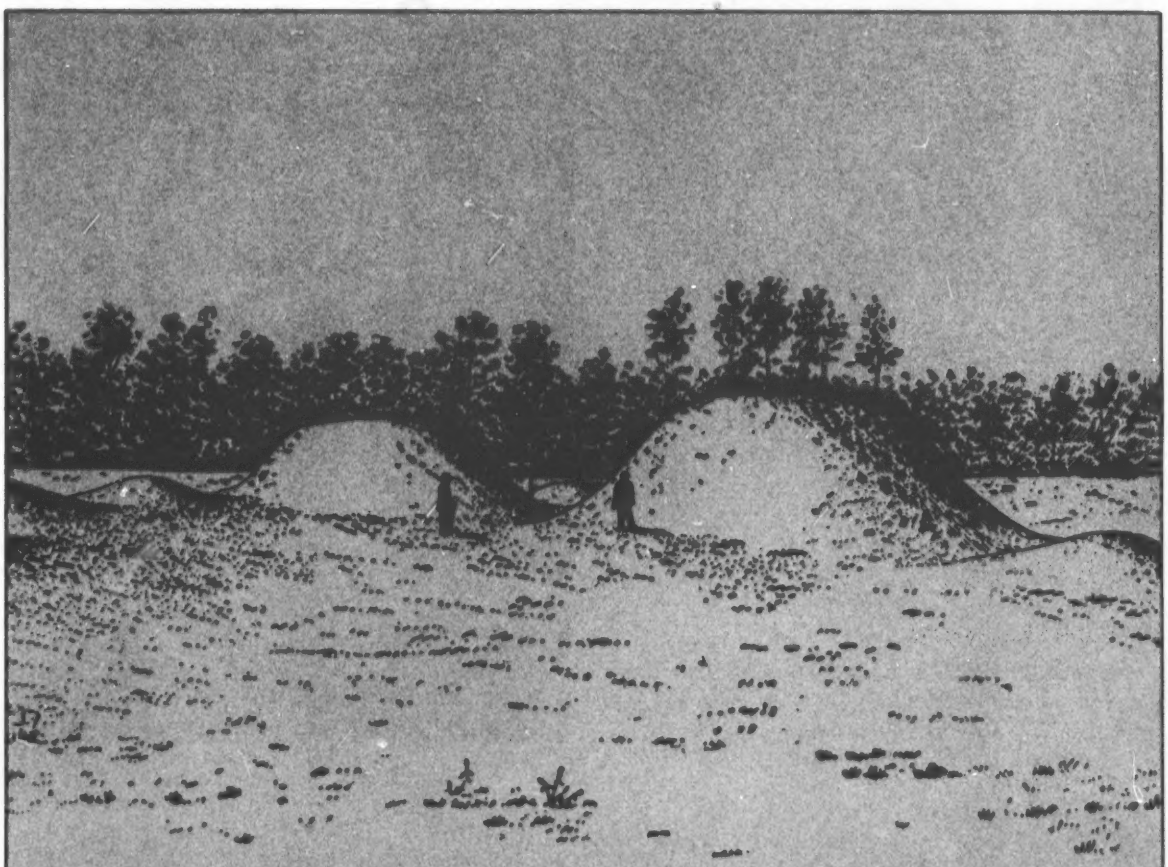
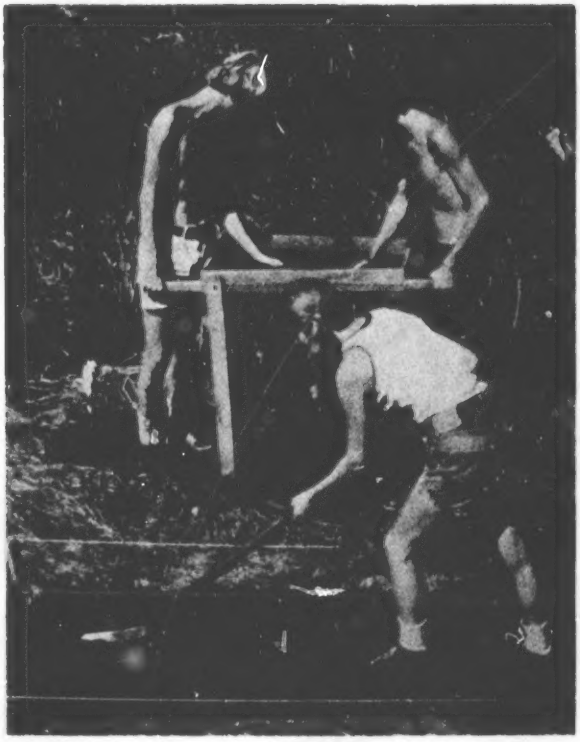


To dig or not to dig

Even when he finds a site, the archaeologist may choose not to dig it up. For a long time archaeologists studied early burials, learning much about how people looked and about their religious and funeral customs. But the study of how people were buried does not really tell the story of how they lived. And today we feel the human graves should not be disturbed. Now archaeologists do not dig in such places unless the sites are certain to be destroyed by road building or other construction. Scientists in recent years have turned to exploring villages and campsites to learn about the daily life of early people.

Some sites are of little use to the archaeologist because they have been damaged. Much of what the archaeologist learns comes from seeing an object as it lies in the ground, undisturbed, next to other things. Wherever a person digs, he destroys. When collectors dig up the ground looking for treasures, they often destroy important clues.

Finally, the archaeologist may want to save some sites for later excavation. He may dig up only part of a site. Or he may not want to excavate it at all, in hopes that future scientists will develop new ways to interpret evidence.



Students of Christy Caine, state archaeologist and instructor at Hamline University, shovel and sift dirt at a site in Anoka County.

Archaeologists at work: Les Peterson records as Gordon Lothson excavates and Douglas George sifts through spaded dirt for artifacts at a site in Dakota County.

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Uncovering the evidence

Finding a site is only the beginning. The *excavation*, or dig, is done by a team of archaeologists, often with the help of students. At Itasca the archaeologist, hoping to get a quick glimpse of what the site might contain, began digging test trenches. But problems arose. Water seeped into the trenches and made the walls sag. A pump was needed to drain away the water. In some cases test trenches miss all the important spots!

The next step is to make site maps. Then the archaeologists set up a *survey grid* to examine the site in more detail. They set stakes at certain points, laying out the ground in a pattern of numbered squares. Each square on the ground matches a square on the site map. As they dig they record in a square of the map the exact spot and depth of each item they find.

Often many different groups of people have lived on the same site at different times. The archaeologist digs in layers. He works backwards, peeling off the layers as he goes. The objects near the surface belong to the most recent inhabitants. People may have built on top of earlier campsites without knowing it. Or they may have buried their trash among the traces of earlier people at the bottom level. Campsites and refuse of the earliest Indians will have been covered by the soil and leaves of many seasons.

Excavation is hard work. In Minnesota it is usually performed in summer. Bugs, rain, dirt, poison ivy, sunburn, and stiff backs are part of the daily life of the field archaeologist. Much of the work is slow and tedious.

Most of the archaeologist's tools are simple and practical. Small shovels, short-handled hoes, and trowels are basic digging equipment. Paintbrushes are used to dust dirt away from objects. After dusting, each item is photographed, numbered, and placed in a bag. Otherwise, fragile evidence that has lain in the ground for centuries could be easily destroyed.

The archaeologist uses a camera throughout his work at a site. He photographs entire sites as well as the objects in the places that he finds them. Sometimes the picture of a fragile object will be all that remains to help scientists learn about how people lived in the past.

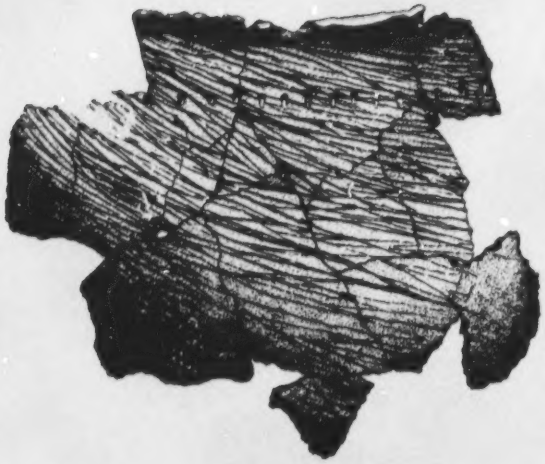
Dirt is often sifted through a wooden-framed screen. Tiny, almost invisible, bits of bone or seed may be found in this way, especially around hearth sites. Charred dirt near an early fireplace may be poured into water. Hidden plant remains, such as bits of seed and wood, will float on the top. These can be identified in a laboratory.

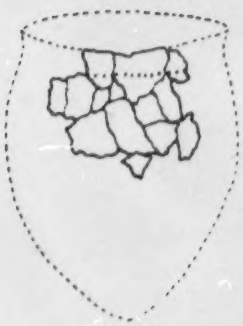
Minnesota Woman

Once a young girl who lived on the western prairie camped with her family near Glacial Lake Pelican near Pelican Rapids. Her father, husband, or brothers were hunters of the great bison that roamed the prairies. The girl probably liked pretty things like seashells. She must have been skillful at using the tools that made her life on the prairie easier. We don't know anything else except that she drowned.

Centuries later, in the 1930s, highway crews discovered the girl's skeleton as they cut a roadway through the area near Pelican Rapids where the ancient lake had been. A seashell with a hole in it and a broken antler tool were found with her bones.

The site was badly disturbed before archaeologists could study it. No one is sure how long ago the girl died. Many people think she lived about 8,000 years ago, around the time of the Itasca bison kill. But others believe she lived much earlier. For many years the skeleton was known as "Minnesota Man." Later research showed that the bones were those of a young girl. Now she is officially known as "Minnesota Woman."





Even small fragments of pottery can often tell the archaeologist who made a pot and when. The pieces at the top were found on a bluff overlooking the Cottonwood River. The design of the fragments helped the archaeologist fill in the outline of the original pot. Its round mouth and pointed base identify it as one made by Woodland Indian people between 100 B.C. *and 800* A.D. *The pot at the bottom was made by Laurel Indians in northern Minnesota.* Drawings by Lee S. Radzak, Minnesota Historical Society Archaeological Survey.

Sorting the pieces

All shreds of evidence are sorted and cataloged in the laboratory. Most need cleaning. Some need preservation, for once out in the air they may crumble and rapidly disappear. After the evidence is cleaned, preserved, and cataloged, the archaeologist can begin to identify the objects he has found. Comparisons, tests, and information supplied by other scientists help the archaeologist in this work.

Each group of early people made tools and pottery by methods their parents and grandparents had taught them. By comparing an *artifact*, or object, with those found in other places, the archaeologist can often tell which group of Indians made the item and when. Archaeologists can learn much from examining even small fragments of pottery.

Early archaeologists had only general ways to guess at the age of an artifact. Today's archaeologists have better methods. *Carbon-14 dating* is one well-known way for finding the age of once-living organisms by measuring radioactivity. *Thermoluminescent dating* or *archaeomagnetism* determines the age of objects like pots through examining magnetic properties. With an *electron microscope* the archaeologist can examine old stone tools for patterns of wear. He can learn what a tool was used for and how long it was in use. He can examine pottery for traces of food that tell him what people ate and how they prepared their food.

Other scientists help the archaeologist. *Botanists* study trees and plants to learn about the climate and moisture of past growing seasons. They analyze bits of charred firewood to learn what kinds of trees were burned in an ancient campfire. Botanists tested the pollen samples taken at Lake Itasca, to find what kinds of trees and plants grew there 8,000 years ago. *Geologists* help by examining rocks and layers of soil and sand. Their work told the archaeologists at Itasca that the chalcedony spearpoints must have been brought to the bison kill site from someplace farther to the west. All of these scientists work together to fill in the details of the past.

Putting together the puzzle

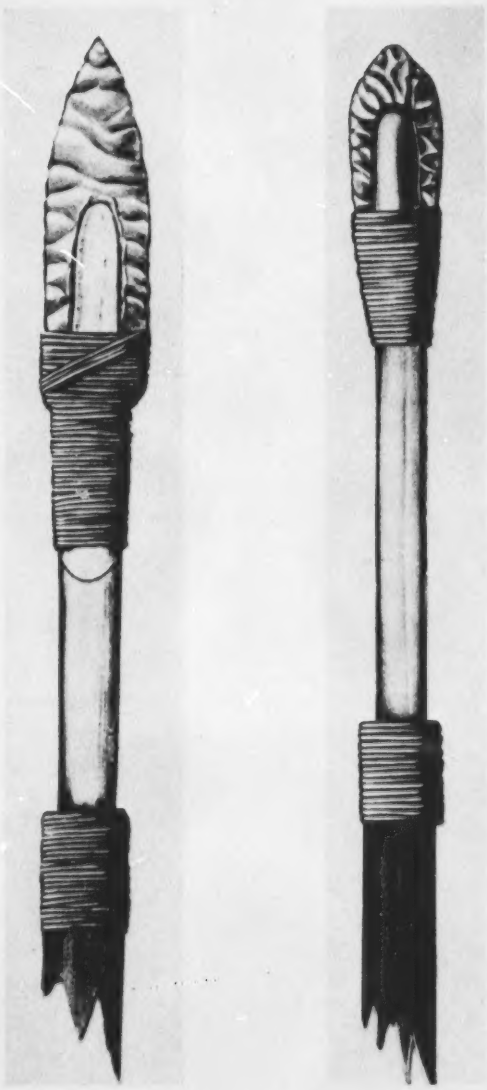
At one time archaeologists simply collected and recorded their findings. They described pottery, bones, and tools and left the work there. In later years, they worked to present a picture of early life in terms of *before* and *after*.

Today archaeologists try to deal with the relationships of people and environments. They ask *why* things happened. They study *how* people changed their lives. They ask whether different groups might have traded tools or exchanged ideas with one another.

Interpreting new finds is difficult. It is one thing to guess and another to be certain. For instance, if hunters killed only enough game to feed their own families, the number of bones at a butchering site would be a clue to the size of the hunting party. This seemed to be true at Itasca. But what if the hunters were providing meat for other people? What if they were trading with another community?

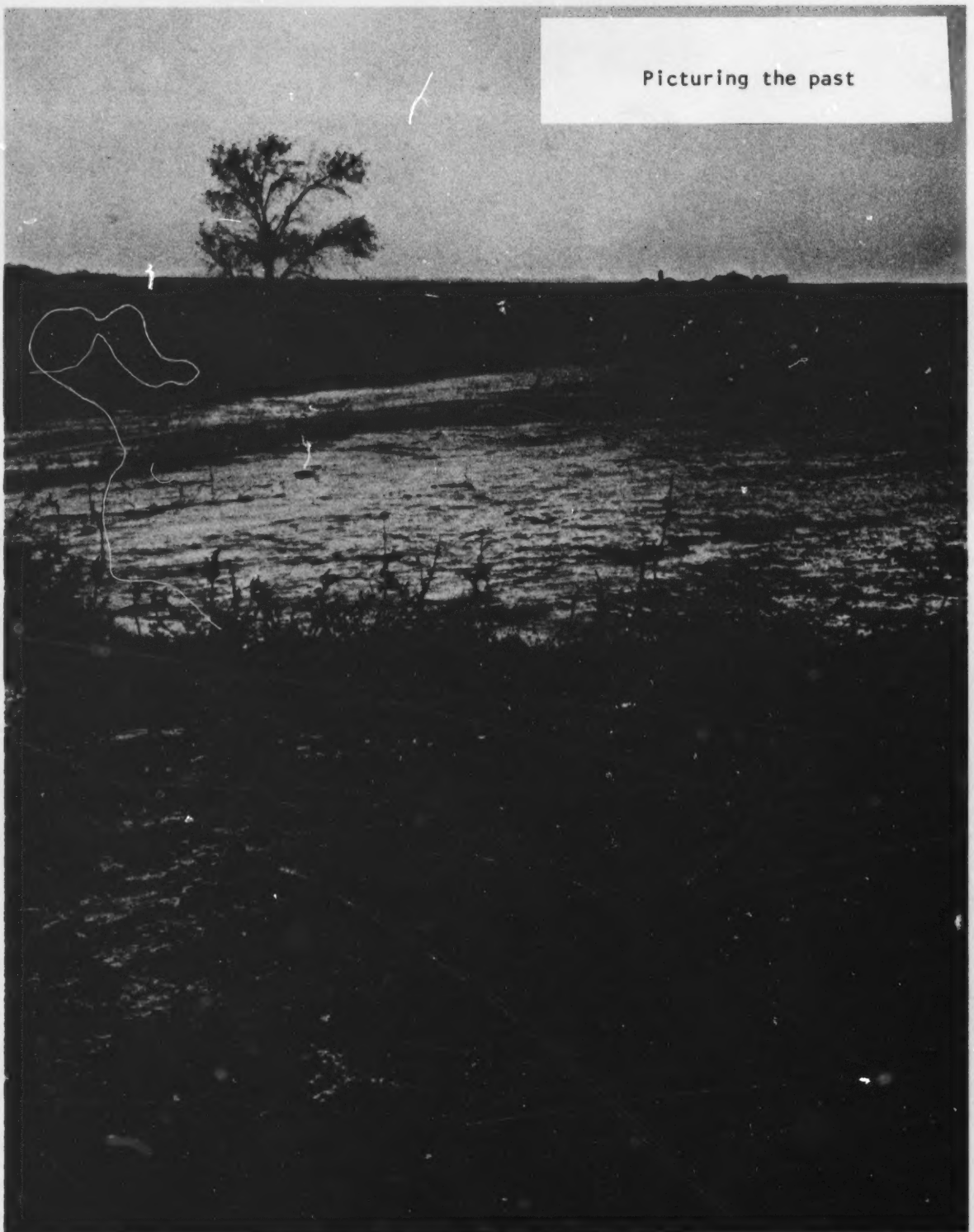
Much is still unknown about how, why, and when people moved, and why some people and ideas flourished and others disappeared. The archaeologist must keep asking questions even when the answers are hard to find. He tries to fit each new piece of evidence into the framework of the puzzle. If a piece does not fit he may have to change the whole picture.

Until 1926 archaeologists thought that people had lived on the North American continent for only 4,000 or 5,000 years. But then at Folsom, New Mexico, they found stone spearpoints with the bones of a huge bison — evidence that man had killed the animal. That bison became extinct 10,000 years ago. The picture of North America's early history had to change dramatically.



Clovis Folsom

At least 10,000 years ago, the spears of Big Game hunters were tipped with fluted stone points. Points like those on the left were found with mammoth bones in Clovis, New Mexico. Points like those on the right were found in Folsom, New Mexico, with bison bones. Such points have been found across southern and eastern Minnesota in surface soil and gravel but never with human or animal bones.



Early Indians gathered along the Red Rock Ridge to carve the pictures called petroglyphs visible at the bottom of the photo. The illustration on the following page shows a cluster of carvings on one section of the ridge. Photo by Al Ominsky.

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We learn something about how early people lived from a stone spearpoint, a hearth site, or a burial mound. But from the pictures drawn by these people we can catch a glimpse into their imaginations and into a world of magic and myth.

Early Indian people carved pictures into rocky ledges and caves. Some of these carvings are thousands of years old. Others are more recent. Early people also painted pictures on smooth cliffs jutting up from rivers and lakes. The rock paintings are probably not as old as the rock carvings. They may have been drawn during the last thousand years. Archaeologists call the carvings *petroglyphs* and the rock paintings *pictographs*.

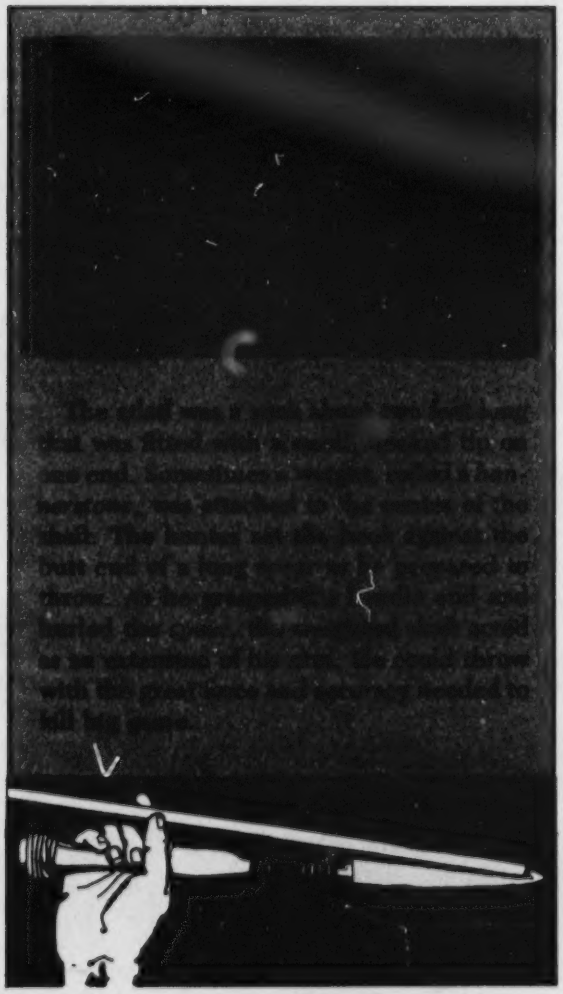
These early carvings and paintings show us how early people looked at their world. But trying to understand the exact meaning of the petroglyphs and rock paintings is like trying to understand a foreign language. Many of the figures are symbols — they stand for something more than the thing that is pictured. Some may have had magical or religious meanings. Others may be reminders of important events.

Carved in stone

The petroglyphs tell us of hunting, warfare, magic, and mystery. The Red Rock Ridge near the town of Jeffers runs 23 miles across the southwestern Minnesota prairie. Early Indians gathered at spots along the ridge for religious ceremonies, storytelling, and carving pictures of great deeds into stone. Over a period of about 5,000 years, they carved almost 2,000 pictures.

The petroglyphs do not show whole scenes as do modern paintings of battles or hunts. The early Indians carved many single figures of animals, weapons, warriors, and sacred symbols.

The first rock carvers in the southwestern region were probably hunters. Bison, elk, bear, and wolves, all native to the area, appear in the



carvings. Spears pierce many of the animals' bodies. Several buffalo are pictured with circles drawn around their front knees. Could this mean that the animals broke their front legs as they fell? We do not know.

As time passed the climate changed, and Indians began hunting new kinds of game. They carved new animal symbols in the rock. Many small animals, footprints, fish, dragonflies, turtles, snakes, and lizards appear. The figure of a dog followed by footprints suggests that these Indians, like those at Lake Itasca, hunted with a dog.

The weapons of the Indians who carved at Jeffers also changed as time passed. There are many pictures of the *atlatl*, an ingenious spear-thrower used by the earliest hunters. The atlatl and spear were the main weapons of the people who lived between 2,000 and 5,000 years ago. A carving of a bow and arrow comes from a more recent period. Indian hunters in the region used the bow and arrow only during the last thousand years or so.

Warriors throwing spears and other human figures struck by spears appear in the carvings. The Indians recorded warfare as well as hunting.

Early people believed that bison had special magical powers. They were the biggest and strongest of animals on the prairie. The petroglyphs show both people and animals wearing headdresses of bison horns, probably as symbols of strength. Later the thunderbird, or great eagle, became important in the beliefs of the Indians. There are many carvings of these symbolic birds of power.

Other pictures are more difficult to interpret. One, for instance, looks like a horse, but it could represent a female elk or moose. If it was meant to be a horse, it must have been carved after 1700 A.D. Horses did not enter the northern plains until that time.

What we learn about the early artists at Jeffers comes entirely from the carvings themselves. Archaeologists have not dug there in search of bones, tools, and weapons such as those that tell the story of the Itasca bison kill. Nevertheless, the petroglyphs tell us something of the daily lives and imaginations of the artists at Jeffers.

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Paintings of mystery

To the north, in a land of rivers, dense forests, and long winters, painted rock pictures present further mystery. Most of these pictographs were painted on the sides of rocks that could be reached from the water. Single paintings are located at many sites in southern Canada and northern Minnesota, unlike the carvings grouped together at Jeffers. The pictographs are hard to date, and each seems to be the work of a single artist at a single place.

Northern forest animals — deer, caribou, moose, bear, and rabbits — were frequent subjects of the pictographs. A sturgeon caught in a net was painted near where Crooked Lake runs into the lower Basswood River. Other sites show human figures. In some places are paintings of canoes carrying people. Now and then there is a sketch of people fighting with bows and arrows.

The most powerful images are of strange, supernatural creatures. The thunderbird, for instance, was believed to create thunder and lightning. It appears many times. Serpents and turtles, creatures of mystery and power, also appear. At one site by Lake of the Woods is a picture of two serpents, one with horns and one with antlers, facing a huge turtle. The lynx, or panther, looked upon by early Indians as the fearsome spirit of the water, often appears. Sometimes the animal has horns or spines on its back, adding to the frightening image.

Many of the pictographs are tied to the myths and legends of the early people. Some images may have been painted in fairly recent times by young Indians participating in the rituals of the secret Mide, or Grand Medicine Society, of the Ojibwe. Figures in these paintings seem related to sacred symbols recorded in birchbark scrolls, outlining the challenge of fasts, hardships, and instructions that young Mide members had to learn.

No one knows just what the rock paintings mean. Were they painted as messages to other people or to some supernatural being? Did they represent the dreams of the artists? People have suggested these and other answers, but no one is sure.

Learning from legends

Stories, myths, and legends have grown up in all cultures to answer big questions: Who are we? Where did the world come from? Why is life the way it is? People have looked at faraway stars. They have listened to the rumble of thunder and wondered.

Every culture has its myths about creation, about where man came from, about good and evil. The Bible has the stories of Genesis and the Old Testament. The Greeks and Romans had gods and goddesses who ruled their lives. Their legends do not depend on scientific evidence. They are filled with magic, mystery, heroes, and gods, and they have tried to explain things that we still do not fully understand.

Indian people also told many stories about the world around them. They sat around fires on cold winter nights, exchanging tales that had been passed down from their ancestors. There were stories about beginnings of things, about brave deeds and adventures, and about the animals, trees, and plants.

Few Indian myths deal with the creation of the world before living beings inhabited it. For the Indians of the woods, water and an original person and animals existed before the winds, light, seasons, and fire came to be. Many stories of the Ojibwe had a hero named Nanabozho or Wenibojo'. His name came to have these and many other spellings as the stories were written down. He was half man and half god. He created the earth during a great flood by sending animals to dive from his raft for sand. He played endless tricks on animals and people who also played tricks on him. Often he was disguised as a rabbit, or hare. He was brother to the wolves. He was the first man to discover that wild rice was good to eat. There are other Indian legends telling of Nanabozho bringing fire to his people and of his defeating a strange Indian, from whose grave grew the first corn.

The Indians of the plains told different stories. A Hidatsa legend brings people living under water up the root of a grapevine to the earth above. Another tells of how the people first learned of corn from their Mandan neighbors.

Some of these legends, told generation after generation in Indian languages, have been collected and written down in English.

Creating the world

Then the rains began to come, and the water came higher and higher. The animals couldn't see. They had no place to go, so they all came to Nanabozho's raft. Everywhere there was water.

After they had been on the raft for a long time, Nanabozho said, "Who will go down to get more earth?"

First the loon went and he came up almost dead. Nanabozho breathed on him and got him to live.

Then the hell-diver went and he came up almost dead. Nanabozho breathed on him too and got him to live.

Then the beaver tried and the same thing happened.

Finally the muskrat dived and he came up with earth in his paws. He was almost dead, and Nanabozho made him live.

Nanabozho blew on the sand, and it spread and the earth became larger. He sent a fast hawk to fly around the earth to see if it was large enough for them. It was gone ten days and then it returned. When it came back, Nanabozho sent the muskrat down for more earth. Then Nanabozho blew on the sand again and sent out the hawk. Nanabozho did this until the earth was large enough.

Nanabozho made this earth for the Indians.

Ojibwa Myths and Legends
Sister Bernard Coleman and others
Ross and Haines, Inc., Publishers, Minneapolis, 1962.

Can you tell what animals these tracks belong to? From top to bottom the tracks are those of the beaver, gray wolf, white-tailed deer, moose, and black bear.

Learning about corn

In the beginning, our Hidatsa people lived under the waters of Devils Lake. They had earth lodges and lived much as we live now. One day some hunters found the root of a grapevine growing down from the lake overhead. They climbed the vine and found themselves on this earth. Others climbed the vine until half the tribe had escaped; but, when a fat woman tried to climb it, the vine broke, leaving the rest of the tribe under the lake.

Those who had safely climbed the vine, built villages of earth lodges. They lived by hunting; and some very old men say that they also planted small fields in ground beans and wild potatoes. As yet the Hidatsas knew nothing of corn or squashes.

One day, a war party that had wandered west to the Missouri river saw on the other side a village of earth lodges like their own. It was a village of the Mandans. Neither they nor the Hidatsas would cross over, each party fearing the other might be enemies.

It was in the fall of the year, and the Missouri was running low, so that an arrow could be shot from shore to shore. The Mandans parched some ears of ripe corn with the grain on the cob. These ears they broke in pieces, stuck the pieces on the points of arrows and shot them across the river. "Eat!" they called. The word for "eat" is the same in both the Hidatsa and the Mandan languages.

The Hidatsas ate of the parched corn. They returned to their village and said, "We have found a people on a great river, to the west. They have a strange kind of grain. We ate of it and found it good."

After this, a party of Hidatsas went to visit the Mandans. The Mandan chief took an ear of corn, broke it in two, and gave half to the Hidatsas for seed. This half ear the Hidatsas took home, and soon every family in the village was planting corn.

Waheenee: An Indian Girl's Story Told by Herself to Gilbert L. Wilson
Webb Publishing Company, St. Paul, 1921.

Finding wild rice

Wenibojo′ made his home with his grandmother, Noko′mis. One day the old woman told him that he ought to prove himself a manly fellow; he ought to take a long journey through unknown forests; he ought to go without food and get accustomed to the hardships of life. So Wenibojo′ told her that he was going away, that he was going to fast; and taking his bow and arrows he wandered out into the forest.

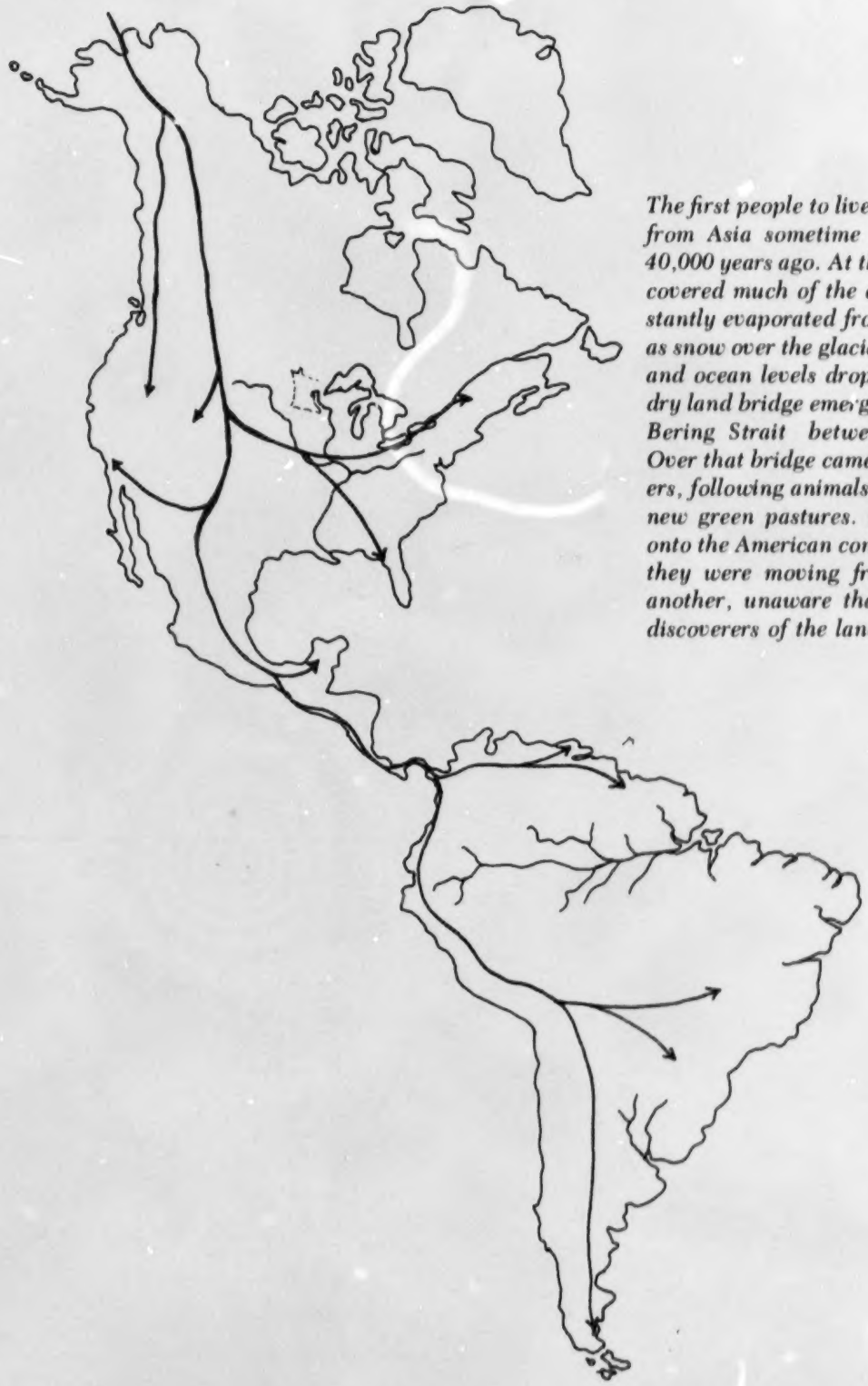
Many days he wandered, and finally came to a beautiful lake full of wild rice, the first ever seen. But he did not know that the grain was good to eat; he liked it for its beauty. He went into the forest and got the bark from a large pine tree. From this bark he made a canoe with which to gather the grain. After the canoe was made, he went to Noko′mis, and they both came and gathered the rice, and sowed it in another lake.

He then left Noko′mis by this lake of sowed wild rice, and, taking his bow and arrows, started away again into the forest. As he wandered along some little bushes spoke to him and said: "Sometimes they eat us." Wenibojo′ at first paid no attention to the address, but finally he said: "Who are you talking to?" On being told that he was the one addressed, he stooped down and dug up the plant. He found a long root, as long as an arrow. It tasted very good to him, so he dug and ate a great many of the roots. He ate so many that he became sick, and lay there three days too ill to move.

When finally he got up, he wandered on. He became very faint and hungry; other plants spoke to him, but he was afraid to eat them. At last he was passing along the river, and saw little bunches of straw growing up in the water. They spoke to him and said: "Wenibojo′, sometimes they eat us." So he picked some of it and ate it, and said: "Oh, but you are good! What do they call you?" "They call us mano′min (wild rice)," the grass answered. Wenibojo′ waded out into the water up to his breast and beat off the grain, and ate and ate, but this time he was not sick. Finally he remembered the wild rice which he and old Noko′mis had sown, so he returned home to his mano′min lake.

Eva Louise Richards.

"The Wild Rice Gatherers of the Upper Lakes"
Albert Ernest Jenks
Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1897–98.



The first people to live in the Americas came from Asia sometime between 20,000 and 40,000 years ago. At that time polar ice caps covered much of the continent. Water constantly evaporated from the oceans and fell as snow over the glaciers. Little of it melted, and ocean levels dropped. Slowly, a great, dry land bridge emerged in the region of the Bering Strait between Asia and Alaska. Over that bridge came hunters and wanderers, following animals that migrated toward new green pastures. Slowly people moved onto the American continents, unaware that they were moving from one continent to another, unaware that they were the first discoverers of the land.

Indians through the ages

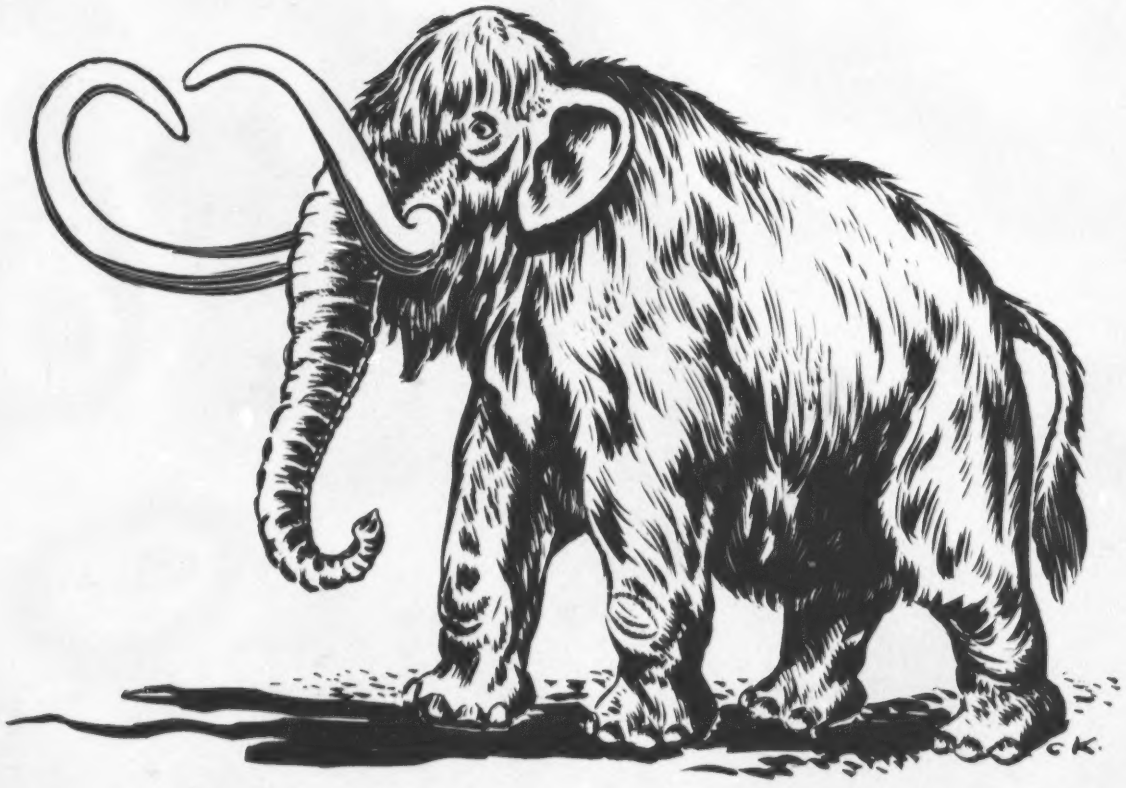
The history of the land must set the stage for the life of early people in Minnesota. For tens of thousands of years, until about 13,000 years ago, ice covered all of what is now Canada and the northern United States. Little survived as glaciers scraped over the land. Ice, often a mile thick and weighing many tons, destroyed the forests and animals.

Not until the ice started to melt could plants and trees again take root in the Minnesota region. Animals then returned from the west and south. And for the first time, human hunters followed the game to Minnesota. The climate for many centuries was cold and damp. Great glacial lakes, filled with melted ice water, covered much of the land. The rest was covered with forests of spruce and fir. Hunters camped beside the lakes to prepare for hunting the Big Game.

As the glacier's edge moved northward, temperatures slowly climbed. By about 8,000 years ago the climate of Minnesota had become warm and dry. The Big Game died out and many new kinds of plants and animals started to live on the land and in the waters. People hunted the new animals and relied more on fishing and plant gathering for food.

About 3,000 years ago there was a cooler period. Only during the last 2,000 or 3,000 years has the climate and the plant and animal life been something like what we know today.

These drawings represent human figures carved at Jeffers.



Hunters of the Big Game

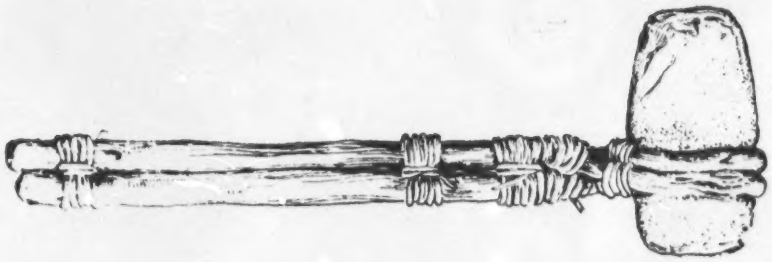
The first people in Minnesota were the Big Game hunters. They came across the plains from the west to pursue the woolly mammoth and the mastodon, two ancient members of the elephant family. The hunters also found the giant beaver, seven feet long and weighing 500 pounds, slogging around in the swamps and building great dams. Musk ox and caribou lived near the glacial edge. Elk and deer grazed farther to the south.

Big Game hunters lived in small family groups without permanent homes, camping near water and hunting sites. They ambushed their prey, often surrounding one of the huge animals in a swampy place where its weight would slow it down. They killed the huge beasts with atlatls and spears. After a hunt they prepared the meat for food and used every other part of the animal.

The hunters made lean-tos of bark, poles, and skins or found shelter in caves. Their tools and weapons were made of stone and animal bones, chipped and flaked into sharp points and edges. Their clothing was made from animal skins. They knew how to use fire.

As the glaciers melted back farther and farther to the north the mammoths and mastodons died, unable to adjust to the warming climate. Many were killed by man. Over generations, the way of life of the Big Game hunters changed along with their environment.

Big Game hunters pursued the now-extinct woolly mammoth — a cousin of the elephant — shown in the picture above.



Hunters, gatherers, and metalworkers

As the climate warmed, pine woods and open grasslands slowly replaced forests of spruce and fir. Oak and chestnut trees began to grow as the weather became even milder. Beaver, elk, deer, bears, and many smaller animals entered the region for the first time.

Descendants of the Big Game hunters learned to use the new food and plant resources around them. Indian families moved with the seasons, but not on such long journeys as those of the Big Game hunters.

In western Minnesota, hunters still stalked herds of bison with the atlatl and the spear. In the woodlands of eastern Minnesota, Indian people hunted smaller animals. They learned to catch birds in nets and to fish in rivers and lakes. They found that berries, roots, nuts, wild plums, and cherries were both tasty and nourishing.

People discovered that tree fibers and grasses could be woven and tied. The inner bark of the basswood and black ash were strong fibers that made fine nets and snares. Birchbark was made into waterproof containers. Liquid could be heated by dropping hot stones into broth held in the bark containers.

Craftsmen began to make new kinds of stone tools. Knives, scrapers, awls, punches, and drills provided comfort and variety as well as survival. Stoneworkers found they could grind and pound certain hard kinds of rock into heavy, strong tools such as axes and gouges.

They made boats by hollowing out logs with the huge stone gouges. In dugout canoes, early Indian people fished and traveled on Minnesota's waterways. Fishermen developed all kinds of gear: stone and bone hooks, harpoon tips, and nets with sinkers.

America's first metalworkers lived in the Great Lakes region during this time. About 5,000 years ago, people discovered copper nuggets in gravel deposits left by the glacier. Copper may at first have seemed to be another kind of stone. But Indians soon learned its value. It was flexible, soft, and could be shaped and polished into sharp weapons and ornaments.

Across northern Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and southern Canada, Indians used copper for almost 2,000 years. They found it in an almost pure state in veins on rock faces and on the shores of Lake Superior. In Minnesota, they discovered it as far south as the upper St. Croix River Valley. Copper workers lived all around Lake Superior and carried the metal westward along the Rainy River. Indians living near Mille Lacs brought copper to their villages from sources near the St. Croix, Kettle, and Snake rivers.

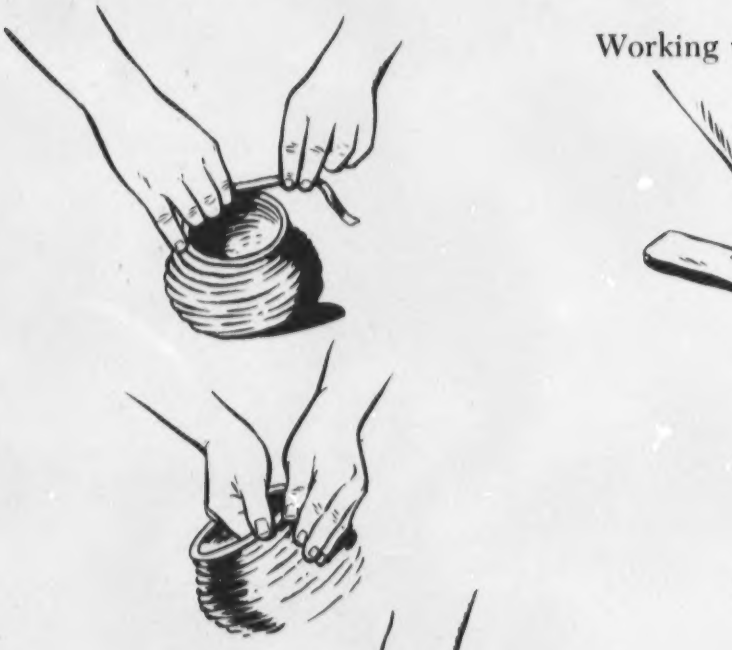
About 3,000 years ago, the Old Copper Culture ended. Much of the surface copper had been used up. Copper tools and ornaments made by later Indians were few and small compared to the many large tools and weapons made during this period.

The Indian people who lived and changed their ways during the period from 5000 B.C. to 1000 B.C. are called members of the *Archaic* tradition. *Archaic* simply means ancient. But Indians of the Archaic period were an adaptive and creative people who learned to live very well in various parts of the region.

Stone tools and weapons

Bone tools

Making clay pots



Working with copper

Chet Kozlak.

Potters and mound builders

About 3,000 years ago, new skills and customs again changed the lives of Minnesota's people. Hunting and gathering continued as a way of life, but Indians started to make pottery and to build earthen burial mounds.

Potting skills that had developed in other parts of the world spread to Minnesota from the east about 2,500 years ago. By about 500 B.C. most of the Indians of the eastern woodlands, called *Woodland* people, were making pots of local clay.

The Indians mixed the clay with sand or crushed stone for strength. They wound coils of clay into the shapes they wanted. They decorated the pots by pressing designs into the soft clay with cord-wrapped wooden paddles. The pots were fired in open pits without glaze or paint. They may have been rubbed with grease to make them waterproof.

The pots of early Woodland people had pointed bases and wide mouths. Later Woodland pots were globe-shaped with narrow necks and flaring rims. Pots were used for cooking and storage and became a permanent part of early Indian life.

About 1000 B.C. powerful new religious ideas began to spread across the eastern part of the United States. Tribal groups started to bury their dead in earthen mounds and to include in their plans great gatherings for funeral ceremonies. They spent time making art objects that could be buried with dead leaders. Religion and ritual were important parts of their lives.

The greatest of the mound builders were the Hopewell Indians, who lived in the Mississippi, the Ohio, and the Illinois river valleys. They built mound centers for burying their dead near rivers where people could easily travel to them. People came for many miles for great religious celebrations.

The largest of these centers involved some four square miles of connected earthworks, walls, avenues, and terraces. Some of the great mounds were round. Some were cone-shaped or low and flat-topped. A few were made in the forms of animals, birds, and serpents. People building the mounds climbed up and down the walls carrying baskets of dirt from pits outside the area. One can only imagine the millions of hours it took to build these earthworks.

The Hopewell Indians traded far and wide for rare materials to use as grave offerings. They looked for seashells, copper, obsidian, bear teeth, mica, silver, gold, fossil shark teeth, and freshwater pearls. From these they made beautiful carvings and ornaments. Some were in the form of hands, birds, and tiny human figures. There were pipes, necklaces, and beautiful beaded cloths to cover the dead.

Minnesota was far to the north and west of the Hopewell centers, but its people also built mounds. Indian people must have talked with

Early Indians built mounds along major waterways. These at Mounds Park in St. Paul overlook the Mississippi River. Kenneth Wright.

Hopewell traders who came to the Great Lakes region for copper. They learned about some new religious and artistic ideas from the eastern people and probably exchanged information about their own lives.

Minnesota's early Indians constructed thousands of earth mounds, 10,000 or more, over many centuries. They built clusters of mounds beside rivers and along other routes of travel. Most Minnesota mounds were small and round. Some were long and low. There were some flat-topped temple mounds and a few in the shapes of birds and animals.

We think of the Woodland people as potters and mound builders. But this does not tell us everything about how they spent their days. Minnesota's Woodland Indians were hunters and gatherers like their ancestors. They moved each season. Years of habit and experience led them to autumn hunting grounds, to the woodlands for nut gathering, and to winter camps in the shelter of forests. In the early spring they collected syrup from maple trees. In the summer they gathered near the rivers and lakes where mounds had been built. There they conducted funerals, held other ceremonies, hunted, and fished.

More than 1,000 years ago, wild rice became an important food for Indians in the region. People started to harvest the nourishing wild grain that had grown around them in shallow lakes for many centuries. They learned to parch and dry wild rice so that it could be stored without molding and sprouting.

Woodland villages became larger and more settled. People often moved to ricing camps to gather the grain in late summer, bringing it back to store for winter months. They may have seeded the grain into lakes to increase their supply.

The Woodland people lived close to nature, sharing the land with the animals, birds, fish, plants, and trees. They planned their lives around nature's calendar. For thousands of years the hunting and gathering way of life worked very well. There was to be one more major change before the white man arrived.

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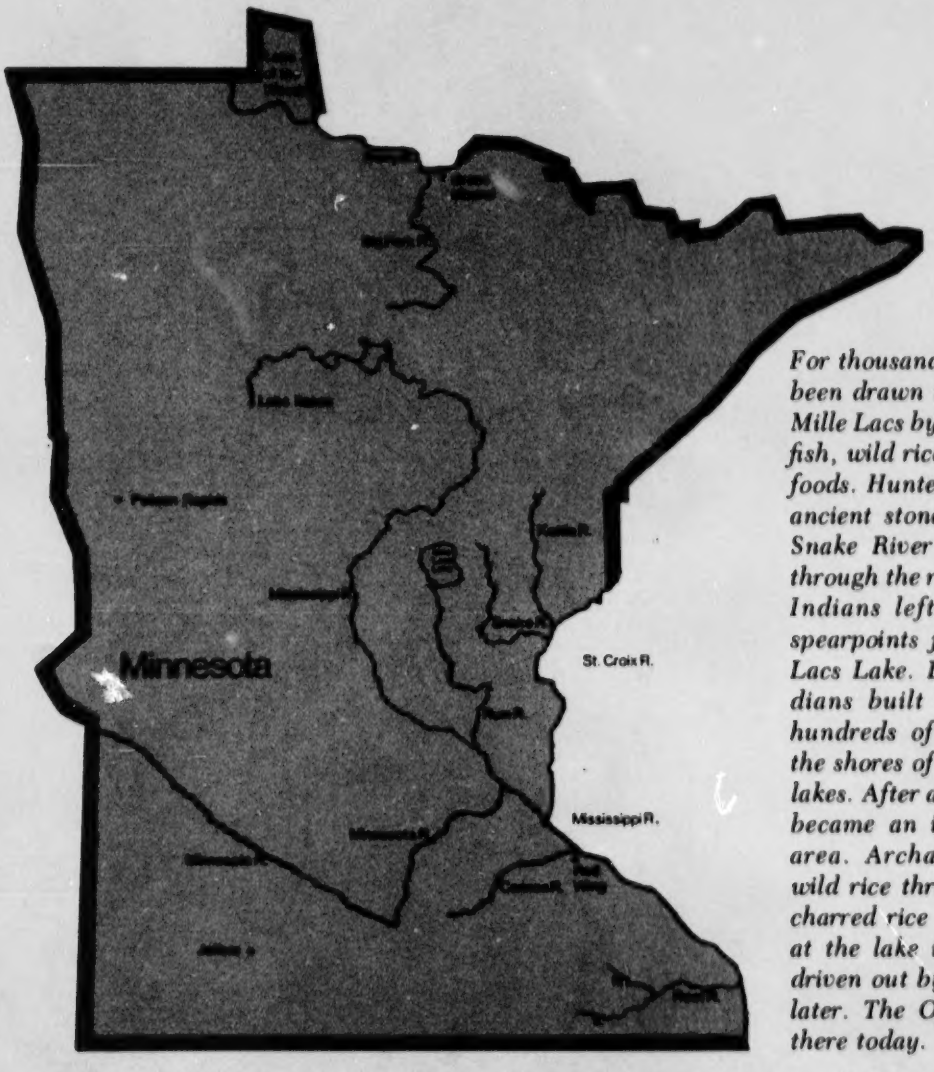
The Laurel people gathered beside the much-traveled Rainy River each spring to hunt and fish for giant sturgeon that were as important to them as the bison were to other Indians. About 2,000 years ago, these people built the Grand Mound at the junction of the Rainy and Big Fork rivers. Over 100 feet in diameter and 40 feet high, it was surrounded by smaller mounds. All played a central role in the religious ceremonies held by the Laurel each spring. There they buried gifts of pottery, copper, bone, and shell to honor their dead. Early hunters using both stone and copper tools lived near Rainy River before the Laurel. And later the Blackduck, who used bows and arrows and barbed harpoons, and harvested wild rice and maple sugar, chose to live there, too.



For thousands of years people have been drawn to the lake region near Mille Lacs by the plentiful game and fish, wild rice, and other wild plant foods. Hunters of the Big Game left ancient stone spearpoints near the Snake River and probably passed through the region. The Old Copper Indians left awls, punches, and spearpoints just southwest of Mille Lacs Lake. Different groups of Indians built villages, camps, and hundreds of burial mounds along the shores of Mille Lacs and nearby lakes. After about 800 A.D. wild rice became an important food in the area. Archaeologists have found wild rice threshing pits and bits of charred rice there. The Sioux lived at the lake in the 1600s but were driven out by the Ojibwe a century later. The Ojibwe continue to live there today.

Today's city of Red Wing stands at the junction of the Cannon and Mississippi rivers. Each spring floods wash rich topsoil into the valley, supplying the wide river plain with some of the state's most fertile land. A natural meeting place, the region was settled by many people, even centuries ago. Travelers moved along the rivers, carrying news and ideas. About 1,000 years ago people in the Red Wing area learned about planting corn and beans, and probably squash, sunflowers, and tobacco, from their southern neighbors. They built permanent houses and villages and dug deep storage pits to hold the corn and beans. Indians continued farming in southern Minnesota, although much of their food still came from hunting and fishing. About 500 years ago the large villages disappeared.

Tillers of the soil

When early Indian people learned farming skills, their lives greatly changed. For centuries they had followed their food supply from place to place. As farmers they could settle into one area and produce the food they needed.

Early corn agriculture started more than 7,000 years ago in the dry highlands of Mexico. Someone discovered that the kernels of the wild grass were good to eat. Then someone found that it could be planted in the ground and gathered when it was ripe. In the years to follow, Mexican farmers found that they could also grow squash, beans, sunflowers, and tobacco. By about 3000 B.C. small farming settlements covered Mexico and Central America.

Between 600 and 1300 A.D. a city known as Cahokia grew up along the Mississippi River, across from where St. Louis is today. During these 700 years the city was built up six times by different people. At its largest, Cahokia may have had 40,000 people. Their way of life reflected some Mexican ideas. They built huge platform or temple mounds and used them as centers for worship. Their leaders seem to have been powerful priests. They must have had enemies, for they built walls and forts around the city. Like some Mexican groups, they killed human beings as a religious sacrifice. And Cahokian farmers worked in the rich, moist soil beside the Mississippi to raise food for the city's people.

The Cahokians, like the Hopewell, traveled widely. They may have traded with Minnesota's early people, but no one knows for sure. The Woodland Indians probably were strongly influenced by the ideas of the people living farther to the south. At any rate, people began farming in Minnesota about 1,000 years ago.

In the Minnesota region, growing seasons were short. Only in southern Minnesota could people raise the kinds of corn, beans, and squash that grew throughout the lower Mississippi River Valley.

Great changes occurred when people found they could raise their own food. No longer did they have to move their homes each season. They could store corn, beans, and sunflower seeds to eat when fresh food was scarce. A different kind of natural calendar, based on seasons for planting, cultivating, and harvest, ordered their lives.

Small, permanent villages grew up along the Mississippi, the Cannon, the Root, and the Minnesota rivers. Some may have had 600 to 800 residents. Farms and gardens were planted in the soft, sandy soil beside the rivers. Women broke the soil with wooden digging sticks and bone hoes. With these tools the tough prairie sod was hard to dig. So they farmed only on the bottomlands.

The villages, which remained small, were often build on flat terraces above the rivers. There the people could find plenty of firewood and shelter from winter storms. Early frosts sometimes shortened growing seasons, and people could not depend completely on corn and beans. Minnesota's Indian people continued to hunt and fish even while they grew crops.

The end of a way of life

When French explorers reached the Minnesota region, they found a land well-settled by Indian people. The Indians lived in tribal bands, fishing, hunting, gathering wild food, or living in small farming communities. They were hunting with stone and bone weapons, spears, fishhooks, and the bow and arrow. They used pottery for cooking, leather for clothing, and shells for decoration. They traveled on foot, by boat, on snowshoes, and by toboggan. Most of the larger farming villages had disappeared.

By the middle 1700s fur traders had brought new weapons, new clothing, and new pressures into the lives of Indian people. Instead of making and producing all that they needed to live, Indian people became dependent on goods manufactured far away. Some archaeologists believe that many early Indians died of diseases brought to North America by the white man. No one knows for sure. Traditions and a way of life that had developed successfully for 10,000 years faced the strongest challenge they had ever met. But the story of Minnesota's Indians living with the white man is another chapter, much recorded in history books, in recent legends, and in the memories of Indian people.